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Adm. Turner: A Good Choice

Senate confirmation of Adm. Stansfield Turner to be director of the Central Intelligence Agency seems a sure thing. Doubtless helping to expedite the process are the facts that he has no close Kennedy ties, nor does he appear to be a conscientious objector.

But like Theodore Sorensen, whose suitability for the CIA post was questioned last month for those very reasons, Adm. Turner is not an intelligence community insider. And, considering the times, that's not all bad. In recent years the Helmses and Colbys have been found wanting.

What Adm. Turner would bring to the CIA directorship, however, is equally important. He is a career naval officer who, since his graduation from Annapolis in 1946, has had a wide variety of sea-and shore-duty experiences. At present Adm. Turner is commander of NATO forces in southern Europe. From 1972 to 1974 he served as president of the Naval War College, and in the late '60s he was executive assistant to former Navy Secretary Paul Ignatius. The admiral has also seen combat in Korea and Vietnam.

But there is another quality which distinguishes President Carter's nominee from so many field grade military officers. Adm. Turner has found time during his professional career to explore fields other than military science. He is a Rhodes scholar who studied philosophy, politics and economics at Oxford.

His thoughtfulness comes through even when discussing the naval balance of the United States and the Soviet Union. In the current issue of Foreign Affairs, Adm. Turner eschews the traditional numbers game to outline a three-step process for assessing naval force structure. Rather than attempting to match the Russians ship for ship, he would place "greater emphasis on trends: where we and both our friends and potential enemies seem to be going." (A fuller account of that Foreign Affairs essay appears in The Press on page 12A.)

Some more liberal members of Congress have expressed reservations about having a military man heading the CIA. But Adm. Turner would not be the first to do so. Since January 1946 five military officers have headed the agency or its immediate predecessors. And although the CIA may have failed to anticipate certain major events during those years, it will be noted that involvement in subverting the Constitution occurred while civilians were at the agency's helm.

President Carter's choice for the CIA directorship is a sound one.